Graduate Students' Reflections on the Use of Online Dictionaries for Writing a Thesis

ผลสะท้อนความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาระดับบัณฑิตศึกษา
ที่มีต่อการใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์ในการเขียนวิทยานิพนธ์

Roiporn Chotkarnchanawat

Graduate Student of Master of Arts in English

Department of English, Khon Kaen University

Chongrak Liangpanit

Ph.D. English Program, Assistant Professor

Sukhum Wasuntarasophit

Ph.D. (English Language Studies), Assistant Professor

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Khon Kaen University

Roiporn Chotkarnchanawat, Chongrak Liangpanit and Sukhum Wasuntarasophit

บทคัดย่อ

จุดมุ่งหมายของงานวิจัยนี้เพื่อศึกษาวัตถุประสงค์ในการเลือกใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์ เพื่อการเขียนวิทยานิพนธ์ของนักศึกษาภาษาอังกฤษ ระดับบัณฑิตศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยขอนแก่น รวมไปถึงศึกษาถึงการปรับปรุงแก้ไขในงานเขียนหลังจากที่ได้ใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์ และสำรวจความคิดเห็นที่มีต่อปัจจัยต่างๆ ที่ทำให้พึงพอใจหรือไม่พึงพอใจในการใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์เพื่อการเขียนวิทยานิพนธ์ ผลการวิจัยจากแบบสอบถามพบว่านักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่มีความคิดเห็นไปในทางที่ดีที่มีต่อการใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์ โดยเฉพาะใช้เพื่อช่วยเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเพิ่มพูนคำศัพท์ และพัฒนาทักษะการเขียน กลุ่มตัวอย่างมีความชื่นชอบการใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์มากเป็นพิเศษ เมื่อจำเป็นต้องใช้ในการค้นหาความหมายของคำศัพท์ คำศัพท์เฉพาะทาง และคำศัพท์ที่เหมาะสม เพื่อนำไปใช้ในงานเขียนเชิงวิชาการ ปัจจัยอื่นๆ อาทิ การออกเสียงของคำศัพท์ การใช้คำศัพท์ ตัวอย่างประโยค และความสะดวกสบายในการใช้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์ เป็นปัจจัยรองลงมาสำหรับนักศึกษา ลักษณะที่สำคัญของดิกชันนารีออนไลน์ที่โดดเด่นกว่าดิกชันนารีแบบรูปเล่ม คือ พกพาง่ายทันสมัย เป็นประโยชน์ อเนกประสงค์ สะดวกสบาย และใช้งานง่าย ซึ่งมาพร้อมกับเนื้อหาที่ครบถ้วนสมบูรณ์ พร้อมทั้งตัวอย่างการใช้คำต่างๆในบริบทหรือประโยคต่างๆ ทำให้ดิกชันนารีออนไลน์เป็นอีกเครื่องมือหนึ่ง ที่สร้างแรงจูงใจให้ผู้ใช้สามารถเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ และผลิตงานเขียนเชิงวิชาการหรือวิทยานิพนธ์ได้ควบคู่กันไป

คำสำคัญ : การเขียนวิทยานิพนธ์ การใช้พจนานุกรมออนไลน์

A b s t r a c t

This research aimed to study the objectives, improvements, and opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis of Thai graduate students majoring in English at Khon Kaen University. The data from the questionnaire revealed that most students had positive opinions on using online dictionaries to help them learn English, enhance their vocabulary knowledge, and improve their writing skills. Participants favored online dictionaries, especially when looking up for technical terms and proper words to use in their academic writing. Other factors such as pronunciation, word usage, sentence examples, and conveniences were the secondary importance. The most outstanding features of the online dictionaries that outperformed the published dictionaries were being handy, trendy, useful, versatile, convenient, and easy to use with rich contents as well as providing examples of word choice in different contexts and sentences. These features of online dictionaries to help the graduate students study, learn English, and write a thesis, concurrently.

Keywords : Writing thesis, Online dictionary

Introduction

Several studies show that online dictionaries can foster vocabulary and language learningand can be helpful for strengthening language skills (Jin & Deifell, 2013; Lew, 2011; Lew, 2015;Liou, 2000; Nesi, 2013) . However, there seems to be no research studies on the use of onlinedictionary as an important tool in an academic writing. In addition, many studies tend to focus onusing online dictionaries for translation, and only text review and revision articles related to thefield of academic writing with no connection and relationship to the online dictionaries have beenfound.

As known, writing is one of the four language skills that are essential in language learning. Most of the time, graduate students who are currently writing a thesis that involves academic writing are required to write academic papers during the years of their study with an inevitable fact that, as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, it is indispensable for them to use online dictionaries as tools to help them write academic documents without difficulty. The current study attempts to address such concerns by exploring students' opinions, objectives, improvements, reasons for choosing online dictionaries, the advantages that they get from using online dictionaries to help them write a thesis, and look-up behaviors. The significance of the study aims to promote the benefits of using online tools such as online dictionaries as an educational resource to learn a language.

Roiporn Chotkarnchanawat, Chongrak Liangpanit and Sukhum Wasuntarasophit

Purposes of the Study

This study aims to:

1. To explore students' opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis

2. To investigate the benefits of using online dictionaries for writing a thesis

Research Questions

1. What are graduate students' objectives and improvements of using online dictionaries to write a thesis?

2. What are graduate students' opinions on the use of online dictionaries for writing a thesis?

3. To what extent do online dictionaries help graduate students write a thesis?

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were twenty-two Thai graduate students majoring in English and studying in the second term of 2016 academic year at Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Khon Kaen University. The students who enrolled in the course 411899 Thesis in their second year were chosen by the purposive sampling method as the sample group for the present study.

The English graduate students were chosen as the sample group in the present study because they were about to earn their graduate degree and had great potential since they had studied mandatory courses requiring them to write academic papers, and, after participating in the study, this could promote them how online dictionaries enrich their academic potential.

The English program is one major of the Arts Program in English. According to the Master of Arts Program in English curriculum, students must complete 36 credits. In addition, they were required to take 15 credits for compulsory English-related courses, 9 credits for finishing elective courses, and 12 credits for completing thesis. In addition, as for the English majors, they must take courses that can intensively sharpen students' English writing skills, for example, Academic Writing in English, Research Methodology in Language, and Thesis. In other words, even though the students had been learning English for a few years in the graduate school, how students think about using online dictionaries to facilitate them in terms of writing a thesis was not yet to be explored.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on Asswachaipaisan (2014) , Lew (2002), Schmitt (1997) , Tananuraksakul (2015), and Varantola (2002) of online dictionary use, questionnaires in dictionary use research, vocabulary learning strategies, students' opinions on the use of Cambridge Dictionaries Online for writing correct sentences, and use and usability of dictionaries, respectively. The questionnaire was written in both Thai and English to avoid any misunderstanding due to limited English competence.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: participants' demographic information, participants' general information, and questions about their opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis. The questionnaire described in detail was presented as follows:

<u>Part I:</u> The participants' demographic information

The first part aimed to collect the participants' personal data and former educational background including genders and how long they had been studying English.

Part II: The participants' general information

The purpose of this section was to examine the participants' general information related to learning vocabulary from using online dictionaries as a learning tool for writing a thesis. There were three items with multiple choices, however, one of them was introduced to rate the frequency of the use of online dictionaries while they were writing a thesis, and two of them were organized to be rated at will, namely they can mark all choices that apply to their behaviors.

Part III: The participants' opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis

The last part was aimed to investigate graduate students' opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis. The participants were required to rate the level of agreement with the provided statements related to the use of online dictionaries for writing a thesis when they cannot continue writing academic documents since they cannot think about new words or synonyms to avoid plagiarism and even encounter new words that they are not sure about word parts to properly use them to form a sentence and how to spell those words correctly. The questionnaire was administered in three items followed by a five-point Likert scale with the range of ' strongly disagree,' ' disagree,' ' not sure,' ' agree,' and ' strongly agree. ' The scales were presented as follows:

1	=	Strongly Disagree
2	=	Disagree
3	=	Not Sure
4	=	Agree
5	=	Strongly Agree

Interviews

A semi-structured interview was the other research instrument of this study. The interview session aimed to find out how online dictionaries help English graduate students write a thesis by selecting the most outstanding points from the questionnaire findings and, subsequently, questioning the participants' opinions after completing the questionnaire to collect the in- depth understanding about the reasons behind their opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis. They were required to openly express their opinions on how online dictionaries concurrently help them study, learn English, and write a thesis. To answer Research Question 3, the data was generated using content analysis that was illustrated in the data analysis session. In addition, all questions for interviewing the randomly selected participants were translated from English into Thai to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Lastly, before the actual data collection phase, all interview questions were examined and adjusted beforehand, and three interviewees were chosen

to provide descriptive and explanatory answers related to their opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis. Those students were selected using the simple random sampling. During the session, the interviews were conducted in Thai to collect the most expressive data.

To collect the qualitative data, a second research tool, the semi- structured interview, was employed after collecting the questionnaire in the data collection to find out how online dictionaries help English graduate students write a thesis by asking the students in a face - to - face interview with each interviewee at once.

The semi-structured interview questions consist of 5 items. The researcher desired giving instruction and information about the present study and introducing the interviewer to the participants to create a good environment and develop positive relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees forming reliance and confidence among the participants. Questions 1-4 aimed to examine the behaviors of the students on how they use online dictionaries to write a thesis. In Question 5, the students were asked whether they had accomplished and improved their writing skills after using online dictionaries. The process of the semi- structured interview for the current study was conducted using the following steps:

i.) Arrange the time and appoint a date in April to meet the interviewees in the classroom at Rattana Pithaya Building at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University.

ii.) Briefly introduce the objectives of the interview session.

iii.) Interview each of the interviewees with 5 questions prepared beforehand and recordthe conversation using a smartphone after asking for their permission.

iv.) Employ the data collected from the interview session to generate notions and aspects concerning what they acquire from using online dictionaries. The interview focuses on each interviewee' s behaviors to answer Research Question 3. The semi- structured interview questions were thoroughly revised by the researcher' s supervisor based on her ideas, suggestions, and advice

v.) All interview questions were translated from English into Thai to reduce the possibility of intervening to prevent the intended message from being unfairly received since the participants' native language is Thai.

Data Collection

In the current study, the copies of questionnaire were distributed to the participants by using Google Forms as online questionnaire. Prior to completing the questionnaire, a brief

information about how to complete the questionnaire was given. However, there were two types of research instruments to collect the data. The written questionnaire was the main instrument whereas the semi- structured interview was a supplementary tool to support the questionnaire' s findings. The data collecting process was conducted in the second term of 2016 academic year with an assistance of the advisor from the English Department at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Data Analysis

The data were qualitative and quantitative, and the analyzing process was done as the following.

Quantitative Data

For all the quantitative data analyses, the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) program was employed to answer the research questions quantitatively.

Mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S. D.) were used to analyze the questionnaire, representing the average of the levels of agreement and the variability of the levels of agreement or the levels of identical opinions responded by the participants, respectively.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were gathered after conducting the semi-structured interview. Content analysis technique was the method used to analyze the participants' opinions. The technique introduced by Zerey (2008 : 73-74) was used throughout the process of analysis in the following: transcribing, coding/ labeling, clustering, looking for interrelationships between categories, and write-up.

Results and Discussion

Answering Research Question 1: What are graduate students' objectives and improvements of using online dictionaries to write a thesis?

Findings obtained from quantitative data regarding Research Question 1 are the following:

Table 1 Findings of graduate English major students' objectives and improvements of using online dictionaries for writing a thesis

Very high	4.50-5.00
High	3.50-4.49
Moderate	2.50-3.49
Low	1.50-2.49
Very low	1.00-1.49

Graduate Students' Reflections on the Use of Online Dictionaries...

Items	Category	Statements	S.D.	Mean	Level
1	meanings	I use online dictionaries to find meanings and definitions of words.	0.63	4.73	Very high
2	pronunciation	I use online dictionaries to check pronunciations of words.	1.11	4.00	High
3	word parts	I use online dictionaries to check word parts (e.g., parts of speech, prefixes, suffixes, and roots).	1.34	3.91	High
4	spelling	I use online dictionaries to spell-check.	1.04	4.14	High
5	meanings	I use online dictionaries to check examples of words occurring in various sentences for a proper use.	0.84	4.32	High
6	collocation	I use online dictionaries to search for English collocations.	0.89	4.14	High
7	idioms & phrases	I use online dictionaries to search for English idioms and phrases.	1.09	3.95	High
8	synonyms & antonyms	I use online dictionaries to spell-check.	1.04	4.14	High
9	technical words	I use online dictionaries to search for technical words that I do not know.	0.80	4.59	Very high
10	slang words	I use online dictionaries to search for slang words that I am not familiar with.	1.11	4.00	High
11	determining whether a word is an English word	I use online dictionaries to check whether a word that I want to use is an English word (checking word existence).	1.23	3.91	High
12	learning new vocabulary	I use online dictionaries to search for unknown words to enhance my vocabulary knowledge.	0.77	4.14	High

Items	Category	Statements	S.D.	Mean	Level
13	improving pronunciation	I use online dictionaries to learn and improve how to properly pronounce words.	0.80	4.18	High
14	word usage & grammar	I use online dictionaries to learn and improve how to properly use words to form sentences.	0.85	4.36	High
15	developing word selection	I use online dictionaries to improve and develop my English skills such as word choice.	0.85	4.36	High

In Table 1, findings from the questionnaire showed that the students viewed online dictionaries as learning tools helping them improve their vocabulary learning, word usage, and word choice and strengthening their English grammar and sentence structure with level of their opinions rated as "High" with a majority of the categories.

Furthermore, the participants rated their opinions as " Very high" with the mean score of 4. 73 and 4. 59, respectively. They admitted that the online dictionary provided them with the guidance to use the words correctly in meanings and definitions with the mean score of 4. 73 and help them learn unfamiliar technical words with the mean score of 4. 59. It can be concluded that the participants significantly made an improvement that meets their objectives, which are relevant to expanding their vocabulary knowledge, when using online dictionaries.

Answering Research Question 2: What are graduate students' opinions on the use of online dictionaries for writing a thesis?

Results obtained from quantitative data regarding Research Question 2:

Table 2 Findings of the graduate English major students' opinions on online dictionaries use for writing a thesis

Very high	4.50-5.00
High	3.50-4.49
Moderate	2.50-3.49
Low	1.50-2.49
Very low	1.00-1.49

Items	Statements	S.D.	Mean	Level
1	I use online dictionaries to search for vocabulary to write a summary.	0.87	4.09	High
2	I use online dictionaries to search for vocabulary to write a paraphrase.	0.66	4.36	High
3	I use online dictionaries to search for vocabulary to write a synthesis.	0.93	4.00	High
4	I use online dictionaries to learn about sentence structure that is formed from the words I want to use before using in my academic paper.	1.11	4.09	High
5	I use online dictionaries to search for proper words to use in my academic paper.	0.48	4.68	Very high
6	I use online dictionaries to help me write flawlessly for good quality of my academic writing.	0.73	4.36	High
7	I use online dictionaries to check for errors in my academic writing in English to avoid mistakes.	0.92	4.23	High

Items	Statements	S.D.	Mean	Level
8	I use online dictionaries to check for the correction of my English academic paper after I finish writing.	1.14	3.64	High
9	I adapt my writing when I form a sentence by learning from examples taken from online dictionaries to extensively use in myacademic writing in English.	1.34	3.55	High
10	I use online dictionaries to search for words that suit an academic audience, conveying meanings and definitions that meet my needs before writing on my paper.	1.08	4.14	High

As shown in Table 2, the graduate English major students had positive opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis with the mean score of 4.36, 4.23, 4.14, 4.09, 3.64 and 3.55 at " High. " In terms of using online dictionaries for academic purposes such as summary, paraphrase, and synthesis writing, they also rated their opinions as "High" with the mean score of 4. 36, 4. 09 and 4. 00, respectively. Moreover, they additionally accepted that one of the main purposes of using online dictionaries is to enhance more proper words that would suit their academic audience to avoid using simple vocabulary in their writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the online dictionaries have much influenced on graduate students when they are required to write academic articles and, more importantly, have enhanced students' vocabulary knowledge.

Answering Research Question 3: To what extent do online dictionaries help graduate students write a thesis?

Findings from the semi-structured interview to answer Research Question 3 were the following.

In response to Research Question 3, to gather the in- depth qualitative information, the semi-structured interview was conducted.

The main objectives are to investigate whether online dictionaries help the students reinforce their vocabulary learning, improve English skills and language learning, and, together with, meet their own desire related to academic writing that would reflect the benefits of the online dictionaries as the tools to help them write a thesis.

Positive opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis

About 66.67% of the interviewees or two interviewees from three of them thought that the online dictionaries were very useful, versatile, convenient, and easy to use for language learning. This reflects the students' positive impressions of using online dictionaries for writing a thesis. The following examples are students' viewpoints as presented below:

"*I really like using online dictionaries since they are very convenient, and I don't have to carry a pile of published dictionaries.*"

(a second-year graduate student, 5th April 2017).

" *I think online dictionaries offer users numerous functions, so they can choose to use at will. I personally like to check parts of speech to avoid any mistakes in my writing.* "

(a second- year graduate student, 5th April 2017).

Negative opinions on using online dictionaries for writing a thesis

About 33. 33% of the interviewee or only one interviewee said that even though using online dictionaries can be convenient for language learners, printed dictionaries give users a variety of words and examples. The example from the student' comment was as follows:

" I feel more comfortable using printed dictionaries since online dictionaries may not be reliable and accurate with a few examples."

(a second-year graduate student, 5th April 2017).

Reinforcing students' vocabulary learning and writing skills

100% of all interviewees mentioned that using online dictionaries helped them learn and discover numerous words because the online dictionaries are very useful for language learners. The examples from the interviewees' responses were as follows:

" *I can widely use several more words with the same meanings that I have learned from online dictionaries apart from simple words in my papers making my writing look interesting and more academic.*"

(a second-year graduate student, 5th April 2017).

"*I can learn new vocabulary with the sentence examples provided in the online dictionaries and simultaneously review my English grammar and sentence structure to improve my writing.* "

(a second-year graduate student, 5th April 2017).

" *I and online dictionaries were meant to be together. When I encounter difficulties concerning either vocabulary use or writing problems, I always need online dictionaries with fast look-up.*"

(a second-year graduate student, 5th April 2017).

Discussion

The findings in the present study echo the previous studies (e. g. , Kaneta, 2012; Mustafa, Sain, & Razak, 2012; Sadeghi & Khajepasha, 2015) and confirm the popularity of using online dictionaries among Thai M. A. students majoring in English. The current study also discovered that students remain independent in choosing either online dictionaries and printed dictionaries, however, one of them based on the interview mentioned that despite the convenience, printed dictionaries are more reliable. Moreover, Google Translate was reported as the least popular online dictionary due to its misleading information such as literal translation in some cases. However, they were fully aware of searching words, definitions, and their meanings to select the most proper vocabulary to use in the writing revealed by the results in this study. They also tended to focus on technical words and word selection. Furthermore, the trendy, handy, convenient, and fashionable characteristics of online dictionaries remain outstanding and outperformed other items and printed dictionaries. Lastly, students reported that they would recommend using online dictionaries for improving English skills to language learners who are interested.

Conclusions

Three of the research questions in this research were 1) What are graduate students' objectives and improvements of using online dictionaries to write a thesis? 2) What are graduate students' opinions on the use of online dictionaries for writing a thesis? and 3) To what extent do online dictionaries help graduate students write a thesis? to find out graduate students' opinions and investigate the benefits of using online dictionaries to write a thesis.

The findings of graduate students' opinions on the use of online dictionaries for writing a thesis were illustrated. The results showed that online dictionaries could assist them in improving their English skills, enhancing vocabulary learning, recognizing, and understanding the meanings and the use of English words, especially writing skills, such as unknown words, technical words, and words to be used in the writing. In addition, they also have positive opinions on using online dictionaries as learning tools.

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